CAREER Keys: Tips from Program Officers

Division of Chemical, Bioengineering, Environmental, and Transport Systems (CBET)
Directorate for Engineering

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CAREER: Proposals

- Critical elements
  - Research and education
  - Departure from Ph.D. work

- Special considerations
  - Panel review -- panel will have broad backgrounds
  - PI specifies program for initial assignment

- Logistics
  - Submit early and resubmit if necessary
  - Follow-up: check for successful submission
  - Fix errors through FastLane before deadline
  - About 1% of proposals are returned unreviewed
Evaluated (mostly by panels) using NSF’s two merit review criteria:

- What is the intellectual merit of the proposed activity?
- What are the broader impacts of the proposed activity?

Reviewers are also asked to consider the capability of the applicant to make an integrative contribution to both education and research and to integrate diversity in all program activities.
CAREER Keys: Miscellaneous Tips from CBET Program Directors
Before you do anything…

- Remember, you don't have to submit a CAREER proposal in your first year!

- Identify the "correct" program. Make sure your proposal fits into one of the program's emphasis areas.

- Ask colleagues to share their successful proposals.
Try these first…

- Serve as a panel reviewer if possible.
- Read the solicitation carefully and anticipate how you will respond to it.
- It may seem obvious but ... start early!!!
Proposal Preparation

- Project long term vision as a new researcher. Show how the scientific or engineering problem you propose is the start of a long-term investigation into an important area.

- Describe how your work in the area will continue beyond the 5-year CAREER award.
Proposal Preparation

- Distinguish what you are proposing from previous work in the same area. Show that you are an independent investigator.

- Know the literature and cite all relevant papers. It provides confidence to reviewers that you understand what you are proposing.
Proposal Preparation

- Preliminary data are very important, not only to help motivate the proposed work, but also to demonstrate you have the skills and tools to carry out what you propose.

- For high-risk activities that may fail, provide alternative strategies that could be tried.
But … do not overpromise in the Project Description. Everyone knows that you will fund only one student with the CAREER grant every year.

Don’t forget Results from Prior NSF Support (see Grant Proposal Guide II.C.2.d.iii). You must describe Intellectual Merit and Broader Impact (in separate sections with headings) for one grant you hold or have held in the last 5 years.
Proposal Preparation

- Do not underestimate the importance of a strong educational plan.

- Make sure your research plan is integrated with your education plan.

- Show how your research can be integrated into leveraged outreach activities (show the added value you bring to existing activities).
Leverage resources on your campus for outreach, e.g. getting high school students in the lab, recruiting underrepresented students, working with museums, etc. Do not reinvent programs. Get letters from programs stating they will work with you and include activities in budget.
Consult with experts in educational research about your educational plan. They can help provide background into methods you will use and how to assess outcomes of your proposed activities. Organized activities on campus usually have assessment experts; see if they can help you.

Don’t forget the scientific/engineering broader impact. What is the significance of your work to your constituents?
Proposal Submission

- Ask colleagues to read it and take their recommendations. It can help to have people not in your research area read the Project Summary.

- The Project Summary is important. It is probably the first thing reviewers will read. Don’t write it at the last second.
Proposal Submission

- The deadline is real – down to the second: 5:00 PM local time.

- If your proposal is declined, start planning resubmission early. Read reviews and the panel summary carefully. Do not resubmit essentially the same proposal.
Tenure-Track Equivalent

What constitutes a tenure-track equivalent appointment?
Tenure-Track Equivalent

My department or organization offers tenure track positions to new employees; however I don’t have a tenure-track appointment.

Can I apply for CAREER under the tenure-track equivalent position?
Tenure-Track Equivalent

No! For a position to be considered tenure-track equivalent....

The employing department or organization does not offer tenure-track positions to any new hires.
Tenure-Track Equivalent

The employee must be engaged in research in an area of science or engineering supported by NSF.

Does this meet the requirement for a tenure-track equivalent position?
Yes! For a position to be considered tenure-track equivalent...

The employee must be engaged in research in an area of science or engineering supported by NSF.
Tenure-Track Equivalent

The employee has a continuing appointment that is expected to last the five years of the award.

Does this meet the requirement for a tenure-track equivalent position?
Tenure-Track Equivalent

Yes! For a position to be considered tenure-track equivalent….

The employee must have a continuing appointment that is expected to last the five years of the award.
Tenure-Track Equivalent

The appointment has some educational responsibilities.

Does this meet the requirement for a tenure-track equivalent position?
Tenure-Track Equivalent

No! For a position to be considered tenure-track equivalent, ....

The appointment MUST have some **substantial** educational responsibilities.
Tenure-Track Equivalent

The proposed research and education relates to the employee’s career goals and job responsibilities, as well as the goals of the department or organization.

Does this meet the requirement for a tenure-track equivalent position?
Tenure-Track Equivalent

Yes! For a position to be considered tenure-track….

The proposed research and education must relate to the employee’s career goals and job responsibilities, as well as the goals of the department or organization.
Tenure-Track Equivalent

Are Adjunct, Instructor or Visiting positions considered tenure-track equivalent positions?
Tenure-Track Equivalent

No! Adjunct, Instructor or Visiting positions are not considered tenure-track equivalent positions?
Although my organization offers tenure, the research institute that employs me does not. Can my position be considered tenure-track equivalent?
Yes! Although you may be affiliated with an organization that offers tenure your employer does not and therefore your appointment may qualify as a tenure-track equivalent appointment. (Providing your appointment meets the additional tenure-track equivalency requirements.)
Tenure-Track Equivalent

Am I eligible to apply if I work at a non-degree-granting organization such as a museum, observatory, or research lab?
Tenure-Track Equivalent

Yes! But you must have a

- tenure-track or tenure-track equivalent position,
- substantial education responsibilities as part of your employment and
- meet all other CAREER eligibility requirements.

The non-granting organization must be non-profit and located in the U.S.